December Newsletter

GROW YOUR LIFE

MIDLIFE HEALTH FOR WOMEN AND MEN

Your gut, your hormones and midlife weight

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Why weight can shift in midlife for women and men, even when nothing else has changed, and what your gut has to do with it.

Book a complimentary first conversation

Hello,

Weight gain in midlife is one of the concerns I hear about most, from women and men alike, and often from people who are eating and moving exactly as they always have. Hormones play a big part. In women, falling oestrogen around menopause encourages fat to settle around the middle. In men, testosterone tends to drift down gradually from around the age of 40, with a similar effect. Either way, more fat is stored as visceral fat around the internal organs, and this is the type of fat linked to heart and metabolic risk.

There is another part of the story that rarely gets mentioned: **your gut microbiome changes in midlife too**, and it plays a part in how your body handles hormones and stores fat.

Here is why that matters, and three simple ways to support your gut and hormones this month.

The hidden hormone loop

For women: before menopause, most oestrogen comes from the ovaries. Afterwards, visceral fat becomes one of the main places the body makes it, mainly a form called oestrone.

For men: visceral fat contains an enzyme called aromatase, which converts testosterone into oestrogen. More belly fat can mean lower testosterone, and lower testosterone makes it easier to store more belly fat, a cycle that can be hard to break.

For everyone: your liver and gut work together to process used hormones and clear them out through the bowel. When gut bacteria become less diverse, as can happen with age, or when the liver or gut are under strain, for example with fatty liver or IBS, more can be recirculated or stored rather than cleared. Supporting your gut and liver is part of supporting healthy weight.

Worth knowing: check your waist

Your waist size is a simple guide to visceral fat. Measure halfway between your lowest rib and the top of your hip bone. A waist of 94cm (37in) or more for men, or 80cm (31.5in) or more for women, is linked to a higher risk of health problems.

Men, if you have noticed low energy, low mood or a reduced sex drive alongside weight around the middle, it is worth speaking to your GP. Testosterone can be checked with a simple blood test.

1. Feed your gut variety

WHY THIS MATTERS

A diverse community of gut bacteria helps process and clear used hormones. Ageing, stress, alcohol and a narrow diet can all reduce that diversity, so it is worth feeding your gut more deliberately.

MAKE IT EASY

- Aim for a wide variety of plants each week: vegetables, fruit, pulses, wholegrains, nuts, seeds, herbs and spices all count.
- Add a small portion of fermented food most days, such as live yoghurt, kefir, sauerkraut or kimchi.
- Build up fibre gradually and drink plenty of water as you do.

2. Make friends with the cabbage family

WHY THIS MATTERS

Cruciferous vegetables support the pathways that help the body clear excess oestrogen in both women and men, moving it on through the bowel to be excreted rather than reabsorbed.

MAKE IT EASY

- Include one portion a day of cabbage, broccoli, cauliflower, kale, Brussels sprouts, rocket or watercress.
- Shredded raw cabbage is quick, cheap and keeps well: add a handful to salads, wraps and sandwiches.
- Stir chopped kale or spring greens into soups and stews in the last few minutes of cooking.

3. Be wary of one-nutrient diets

WHY THIS MATTERS

Social media is full of advice that focuses on a single nutrient, very high protein at the moment. Protein is important in midlife, but when one nutrient takes over the plate, the fibre and plant variety your gut relies on can be squeezed out.

MAKE IT EASY

- Use a simple plate guide: half vegetables and salad, a quarter protein, a quarter wholegrains or starchy vegetables, plus a little healthy fat.
- Pair your protein with plants at every meal, for example eggs with spinach and tomatoes, or fish with greens and lentils.
- Question any plan that asks you to cut out whole food groups.

BONUS TIP

A five-minute crunchy cabbage slaw

Finely shred a quarter each of red and white cabbage. Add a grated carrot and a grated apple, then toss with a squeeze of lemon, a drizzle of extra virgin olive oil and a handful of toasted seeds. It keeps in the fridge for two to three days and gives you a cruciferous portion, fibre and plant variety in one go.

If midlife weight changes, gut symptoms or hormonal shifts are affecting you, I can help you understand what is happening in your body and build a plan that fits your life.

As a GP of over 30 years and a lifestyle medicine and menopause practitioner, I look at the whole picture, from hormones and gut health to stress, sleep and movement.

This newsletter is general information, not personal medical advice. Please speak to your own doctor before making changes, especially if you have a medical condition or take regular medication.

Stay Well,
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